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ABSTRACT

The Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) has recently developed a new protocol for accrediting schools entitled "Focus on Learning" (FoL). This monograph explains how the FoL process can influence student learning and serve as a vehicle for school improvement and accountability. The following information is addressed: the rationale for this revision, an overview of FoL, including the criteria, the power of FoL to support the role of principal as a curriculum leader, FoL as the foundation for school accountability, and the results from initial use of FoL. The FoL process has already been widely accepted throughout the WASC region as integral to the heart of education--successful student learning. Appendices contain key terminology, "Focus on Learning" criteria, indicators, and resources. (Contains 23 references.) (DFR)

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Focus On Learning:

A SCHOOLWIDE RENEWAL PROCESS OF ANALYSIS & ACTION

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Focus On Learning:

A SCHOOLWIDE RENEWAL PROCESS OF ANALYSIS & ACTION

October 1996

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Preface

If educational organizations are to concentrate all their energies and resources on successful student learning, a holistic, honest examination of the actual program for students is required. Through the use of empowering criteria, new communication patterns, evidence gathering techniques, and insight from fellow educators, the appropriate accreditation process can serve as a vehicle to move school community members into meaningful schoolwide improvement and accountability. The Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), has recently developed a new protocol for accrediting schools entitled *Focus on Learning*. This monograph will explain how the *Focus on Learning* process can impact student learning and serve as a vehicle for school improvement and accountability. The following information will be addressed:

- the rationale for this revision
- an overview of *Focus on Learning*, including the criteria
- the power of *Focus on Learning* to support the role of principal as a curriculum leader

FOCUS ON LEARNING: A SCHOOLWIDE RENEWAL PROCESS OF ANALYSIS & ACTION

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- *Focus on Learning* as the foundation for school accountability
- the results from initial use of *Focus on Learning*

The *Focus on Learning* process has already been widely accepted throughout the WASC region as integral to the "heart" of education-successful student learning. This has been demonstrated through a variety of *Focus on Learning* adaptations as WASC works jointly with numerous educational associations. Public, independent and church-related private K-12 and adult schools value the "basic components" of *Focus on Learning* that can be "institutionalized" as the schools address growth areas, impacting student learning. These include: (1) the defining of quality achievement of schoolwide learning expectations for every student by all stakeholders, (2) schoolwide interdisciplinary dialogue based on evidence gathering and analysis about what students are doing and producing, and (3) the development, implementation, and accomplishment of a schoolwide action plan. Therefore, all schools view the *Focus on Learning* process as a living document.

Introduction

The revised accreditation protocol is a reflection of the change in the way teaching and learning are seen throughout the profession. The basic driving issue is how schools view their mission or purpose: why do schools exist; what value do they add to society? Previous thinking would generally conclude that the business of schools was teaching; the current thinking and the philosophy incorporated in *Focus on Learning* is that the business of schools is learning.

This is more than a semantic difference. If teaching is the business of schools, then the measurement of success would be an assessment of the teaching strategies used, the teaching processes employed and the overall support the institution supplied to the teaching act. Never mind whether students are learning or the degree to which learning objectives are achieved. This notion--that teaching is our business--drove every aspect of the organization. Teacher evaluation systems focused almost entirely on observing short samples of teacher behavior, examination of lesson plans, reviewing materials to be used and other symbols of "effective teaching". It was accepted that one could teach well even if no learning

occurred. If the business of the school is teaching, this is a reasonable declaration.

Value Added Test

Schools Add Value By:

- Increasing What Students Know
- Increasing What Students Can Do
- Improving How Students Feel
  - About Themselves
  - About Others
  - About Learning

The Assessment/Accreditation Process should give a reading on the learning value added by the school.

On the other hand, if learning is the business of the school, success is only achieved when learning occurs. In this scenario the nature of the school and classroom management change and the indicators of classroom and institutional success relate to the amount and quality of student learning which occurs. Evaluation of the school, and individual staff members, becomes connected to how well students learn with less attention being given to examining teaching methodologies as a way of

evaluating school effectiveness. Teachers become accountable for facilitating student learning and are allowed to adopt and develop teaching methods which accomplish this objective.

Evaluation of student learning, particularly the learning value added by the school, is very difficult and explains to some degree why we have clung to, and often revert back to, assessing teaching behaviors instead of learning. The *Focus on Learning* model presses us to persist in the effort to develop sophistication in assessing a wide range of student achievement as a basis for evaluating our professional work and as a means for developing plans for improvement.

The transition to assessing ourselves as educators by the value we add to student learning is in consonance with, and driven by, what is happening in the broader social environment. The era of declining resources and worldwide competition has led to greater emphasis on accountability in most areas of our society.

Accountability leads to accessing the ultimate value of the service delivered to the customer. Customers are generally not concerned with the processes used to produce a product. They are concerned about quality, reliability and cost. In education, what the student takes home with him in the way of knowledge, skills and attitudes is the measure of the school's value for the primary customer, the student, and the secondary customers, the parents and society in general.

Consequently, educators must commence

to examine and report productivity in terms of what students learn, not the processes employed.

Lessons to Facilitate Change

1. You can't mandate what matters
2. Change is a journey not a blueprint
3. Problems are our friends
4. Vision and strategic planning come later
5. Individualism and collectivism must have equal power
6. Neither centralization nor decentralization work
7. Connection with the wider environment is critical for success
8. Every person is a change agent

— *Fullan's "Eight Basic Lessons of the New Paradigms of Change"*

Focus on Learning incorporates this new paradigm into its protocol. The four criteria areas examined are tightly connected to organizational productivity: student learning. In the final analysis, the school is asked to examine its learning expectations against actual student learning outcomes and develop plans to ameliorate any discrepancies between expectations and performance.

Although many characteristics of a school can reasonably be assumed to relate to student learning, these are not the focus of the review.

The review starts with an assessment of how all students are learning and then backtracks to determine the missing organizational links which might explain any discrepancies between the expected and actual learning achieved by students. Then, and only then, are plans laid for actions to ameliorate the differences.

Focus on Learning is designed to help the school engage the energies of all community members in clarifying and gaining endorsement of its purpose and schoolwide learning expectations, and developing carefully designed plans to accomplish the purpose. The school will also develop measurements that will show the degree to which the school's learning expectations are being achieved. Since each school community is unique, the process allows the school to use considerable flexibility in its approach to the study. Once it clarifies its learning expectations, the school can allow greater flexibility to the professional staff in the way learning is caused.

In summary, WASC has adopted a new accreditation protocol which is in concert with the current research and professional thinking about teaching, learning and organizational development. The recently released report of the National Commission on the Restructuring of the American High School, a group composed of educational practitioners, supports and reinforces the premise of the WASC revised process. The nine overall purposes reflect a similar vision for every K-12 school, not just high schools.

1. High school [*Every school]* is, above all else, a learning community and each school must commit itself to expecting demonstrated academic achievement for every student in accord with standards that can stand up to national scrutiny.

2. High school *[Every school]* must function as a transitional experience, getting each student ready for the next stage of life, whatever it may be for that individual, with the understanding that, ultimately, each person needs to earn a living.

3. High school *[Every school]* must be a gateway to multiple options.

4. High school *[Every school]* must prepare each student to be a lifelong learner.

5. High school *[Every school]* must provide an underpinning for good citizenship and for full participation in the life of a democracy.

6. High school *[Every school]* must play a role in the personal development of young people as social beings who have needs beyond those that are strictly academic.

7. High school *[Every school]* must lay a foundation for students to be able to participate comfortably in an increasingly technological society.

8. High school *[Every school]* must equip young people for life in a country and a world in which interdependency will link their destiny to that of others, however different those others may be from them.

9. High school *[Every school]*must be an institution that unabashedly advocates on behalf of young people.

Therefore, *Focus on Learning*, the new process, holds student learning to be the ultimate business of schools and focuses the accreditation review on assessing the school's effectiveness in generating meaningful learning on the part of students. As Peter Senge wrote in *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, "The most important innovations in infrastructure for learning organizations will enable people to develop capabilities like systems thinking and collaborative inquiry within the context of their jobs."

Beyond Semantics

A Tuesday Evening in late August

"Thanks for all your help this summer, Mr. Perez. You were a great coach for our church baseball team. I sure hope I get into your class before it closes in the fall scramble. My friends really liked being in your class last year."

"Let's hope your schedule works out as you've planned, Wayne. I would like to have you in my class, and I really enjoyed coaching the team."

As Frank Perez and his lovely wife left the pizza parlor, he had a great feeling of satisfaction; he appreciated Wayne's remarks. That made all the time and effort with the church team and his teaching worthwhile.

"Oh, by the way, the Smiths have invited us to a barbecue next Saturday--one last big fling before school starts," Mrs. Perez said with a laugh. "Is that all right with you, honey? I was pleased to be asked. You know we really have a nice social life -- a great group of friends."

Frank didn't even hear his wife's remarks. As both of them got into the car and he began driving home, his thoughts had wandered already to the upcoming school year. Having taught for more than 25 years,

he knew working with students like Wayne would make this year interesting. Comments like Wayne's re-enforced his decision to stay in teaching.

Frank continued to think about the new school year with his facial expressions becoming more and more disgruntled. He wondered about this new process, *Focus on Learning*, that the principal was emphasizing in his August letter of welcome to the staff. Another new plan for school improvement that the principal was marketing!

His thoughts raced ahead as he instinctively slowed the car for a traffic light that seemed to suddenly loom into sight. Surrounding the intensive red of the traffic light was the glare of flashing neon signs which seemed to impact him with educational instructional terms such as critical mass, empowering, action research, learning styles, cooperative learning, student engagement, higher level thinking. Why couldn't he just teach and concentrate on students? After all, he chose teaching because he likes the kids--but the hassles! Oh, the pros and cons of being a teacher--another year!

The Following Tuesday at a Faculty Inservice Meeting

Patsy Lee, the Catalytic Changer High School's self-study coordinator, and Joe Pratt were presenting the overview of this new self-study process, *Focus on Learning*. Mr. Perez thought, "Another report to write just like the last time. Why are we worried about it now, the visit is not until next spring." However, as Patsy continued, her words began to catch his attention. The entire staff, administration, parents, students, and district leadership

would work together in this process through Schoolwide Focus Groups. We would come to consensus about what we wanted students to know, understand, and be able to do by graduation. There would be no departmental or program reports. We would concentrate all our energies on determining how students are doing with respect to these schoolwide learning expectations. Amazing!

We would be discussing the quality and growth over time of what students are doing and producing as we conducted schoolwide classroom observations, student interviews, and examination of student work. The goal of this *Focus on Learning* was to concentrate our energies on professional strategies and activities and use of all resources that centered on all students being successful learners. This process would result in an ongoing schoolwide action plan that we implement and monitor ourselves.

Frank became totally absorbed in what he was hearing. Obviously this was not a "show and tell" process. As he perused the handouts in his WASC folder, he liked the WASC criteria. The logo on the front of the folder re-enforced Patsy's comments: WASC meant, "We Are Student Centered." He said to himself, "We actually are going to be involved in a process that would support my belief that focusing on students and their learning is why we're in education. What we will be doing is what we want to do as student learning advocates."

When Patsy finished, she asked for comments or questions from her colleagues. "Hey, count me in!" Frank said excitedly, "This is a process to manage the change we've been wanting--to be part of a learning community with high learning expectations

for EVERY student. . .and furthermore WE analyze and take action where WE see the need for growth--everything focusing on successful student learning. *We actually will get beyond 'paper reports' and semantics!*"

* * * * * * *

As this monograph presents the *Focus on Learning* overview, the important questions surrounding this revised process, and the results of schools using this process, the reader will indeed see that what Frank Perez expressed in this vignette has occurred.

The *Focus on Learning* Process: Overview

What Are the Important Concepts and Features?

The revised accreditation process for WASC resulted from intensive work of an advisory group composed of representatives from the WASC region. They synthesized the issues and concerns from the WASC constituency with current thinking and research-based knowledge about teaching and learning. The basic concepts addressed in *Focus on Learning* focus upon student success in meeting learning expectations (i.e., what all students should know and be able to do by graduation).

They are:

1. How are the students doing with respect to the schoolwide learning expectations?

2. Is the school doing everything possible to support high achievement of these expectations for all its students?

To ensure that the critical elements of school change were integral to the *Focus on Learning* design, the following specific features are included:

- *involvement & collaboration* of each school community group, (i.e., faculty, support staff, administrators, students, parents, school board, community partners)
- the development of *schoolwide learning expectations*: (i.e., what all students should know and be able to do by graduation)
- an analysis of the degree to which schoolwide learning expectations are achieved by all students
- *interdisciplinary dialogue and examination* of the school program through schoolwide focus groups
- analysis of the instructional program results compared to *WASC schoolwide criteria through evidence gathering and analysis*, including examination of student work
- development of a *schoolwide action plan based upon consensus* that will support all students accomplishing the learning expectations

- the school's *continuous monitoring of the implementation and accomplishment of the established action plan*

> *"The challenge of the 1990's will be to deal with...changes that affect the culture and structure of schools, restructuring roles and reorganizing responsibilities, including those of students and parents."*
>
> — Michael Fullan
> *The New Meaning of Educational Change, 1991*

What Is Unique about the Revised WASC Criteria?

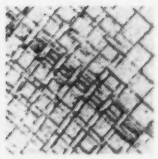
The pilot *Focus on Learning* criteria are research-based guidelines of systemic school improvement that address accreditation's central tenet: a school operates with a clear understanding of its purpose. The criteria were developed with the assistance of numerous practicing educational leaders and theorists. The objective was to develop criteria that brought attention to concepts and factors that differentiate between effective and ineffective schools. Since most formal education occurs in an institutional setting, factors that impact institutional effectiveness were considered along with curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment.

Specifically, in *Focus on Learning* the schools will be assessed against criteria that are organized into four categories of criteria. These are:

- Organization for Student Learning
- Curriculum and Instruction

- Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth
- Resource Management and Development

In addition, there are indicators that further explain the criteria and lists of suggested evidence for schools to examine in comparing their program for students to the criteria. The criteria are shown on the following pages:



Focus On Learning: WASC Schoolwide Criteria

A. Organization For Student Learning

School Purpose

1. The school has established a clear statement of purpose that reflects the beliefs and philosophy of the institution and research-based knowledge about teaching and learning.

Governance

2. The governing authority (1) adopts policies which are consistent with the school purpose and drive the learning expectations for the school, (2) delegates implementation to the professional staff, and (3) monitors results.

School Leadership

3. The school leadership: (1) makes decisions to facilitate actions that focus the energies of the school on student achievement of the schoolwide learning expectations, (2) empowers the staff, and (3) encourages commitment, participation and shared accountability for student learning.

Staff

4. The school leadership and staff are qualified, committed to the school's purpose and to ongoing professional development that will promote student learning.

School Environment

5. A safe, healthy, nurturing environment that reflects the school's purpose is characterized by a respect for differences, trust, caring, professionalism, support, and high expectations for each student.

Reporting Student Progress

6. The school leadership and staff regularly review and report to the rest of the school community student progress toward accomplishing the school's purpose related to student learning.

School Improvement Process

7. Based on the self-study and the visiting committee report, the school leadership facilitates school improvement, a

process which (1) is driven by plans of action that embody quality learning for all students, (2) has school community commitment and involvement, and (3) effectively guides the work of the school. The leadership and instructional staff, in cooperation with the rest of the school community, demonstrate accountability through the monitoring of the schoolwide action plan implementation.

B. Curriculum and Instruction

What Students Learn

1. The school provides a challenging, coherent and relevant curriculum for each student that fulfills the school's purpose and results in student achievement of the schoolwide learning expectations (what all students should know and be able to do).

How students learn

2. The professional staff designs and implements a variety of learning experiences which actively engage students at a high level of learning that is consistent with the school's purpose and expectations.

How Assessment Is Used

3. Teacher and student use of assessment is frequent and integrated into the teaching/learning process. The assessment results are the basis for (1) mea-

surement of each student's progress toward the schoolwide learning expectations, (2) regular evaluation and improvement of curriculum and instruction, and (3) allocation of resources.

C. Support For Student Personal and Academic Growth

Student Connectedness

1. Students are connected to a system of support services, activities and opportunities at the school and within the community to meet the challenges of the curricular/co-curricular program in order to achieve the schoolwide learning expectations.

Parent/Community Involvement

2. The school leadership employs a wide range of strategies to ensure that parental and community involvement is integral to the school's established support system for students.

D. Resource Management and Development

Resources

1. The resources available to the school are sufficient to sustain the school program and are effectively used to carry out the school's purpose.

Resource Planning

2. The governing authority and the school execute responsible resource planning for the future.

What Are the Key Outcomes of Conducting the Self-Study Process?

The self-study process is intended to provide flexibility for schools and yet still be linked to sound components of a quality self-assessment. Therefore, what evolved were the following five key outcomes to which schools must adhere as they modify the self-study process to accommodate their individual school community needs:

1. the involvement and collaboration of members of the school community in the self-study

2. the clarification of the school's purpose and schoolwide learning expectations

3. the assessment of the actual student program with respect to the criteria

4. the development of a schoolwide action plan and correlated subject area/support program action steps to address identified growth needs

5. the development and implementation of an accountability system for monitoring the accomplishment of the action plan

Why Is Clarification of the School's Purpose and Learning Expectations Important?

The *Focus on Learning* process is predicated upon the essential element of systemic school

improvement: a clear statement of purpose on the part of the members of the school community. Questions such as the following need to be asked by all stakeholders: What should all students know and be able to do upon exit from the school? What does it mean to be an educated person? What is the most effective preparation of students for the future?

The purpose provides the school's foundation for establishing schoolwide learning expectations; these state the knowledge, skills, and understandings students should possess when leaving the school. Examples include:

Upon graduation every student will be able to . . .

- communicate effectively
- work effectively with others
- demonstrate higher order thinking skills
- be a lifelong learner
- be a productive and responsible citizen
- have a basic technological literacy

The attainment of these learning expectations drives the instructional program and the support operations of the school and therefore is integral to the school's accreditation process.

Why Is Observable Evidence Important in this Process?

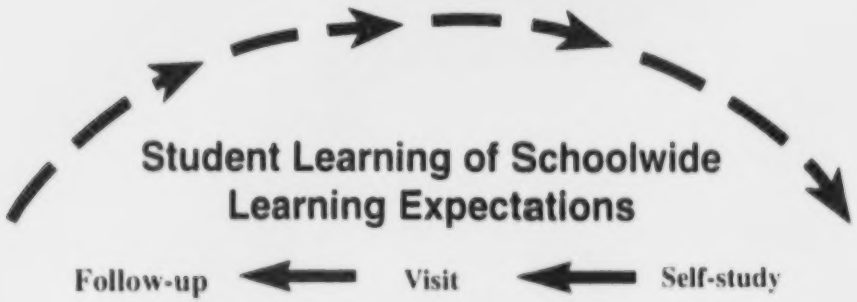
Translating the school's purpose into schoolwide learning expectations for all students is a beginning. These learning expectations become the pivotal points for a school's assessment and accountability of student learning: the bottom line in education. The self-study phase of the accredita-

tion process revolves around an in-depth gathering and analysis of observable evidence that will enable a school to take an honest look at what is and is not working based upon the criteria and the schoolwide learning expectations. This verification is key to learning about the actual learning experienced by students.

Observable evidence includes analyzing results, including:

- what students are doing and producing (student work)
- student interviews and observations
- hard data and information, e.g., student indicators for attendance, special needs, schoolwide performance
- other interviews, observations, etc.

The *Focus on Learning* self-study process centers upon the examination of student work because it is integral to the ongoing determination of successful student learning. Initially, the quality of student work may be examined with respect to course or program goals and objectives. Instructional staff members will be involved in this process individually and through discussions within and among disciplines; for example, those who teach the same courses or are at the same grade level may engage in dialogue. There is no one way to gather and analyze student work. However, ultimately, the student work analysis should also provide information about the degree to which the students are accomplishing the schoolwide learning expectations.



Self-study

- Development and analysis of student/-community profile
- Development, refinement or clarification of schoolwide learning expectations
- Review of progress on school improvement
- Analysis of observable evidence* about quality of school program for every student based on criteria and schoolwide learning expectations
- Development of schoolwide action plan and follow-up process

Visit

- Insight and perspective of visiting committee regarding student and learning based on criteria and schoolwide learning expectations

Follow-up

- Refinement, implementation, and monitoring of schoolwide action plan
- Analysis of evidence on student achievement of established schoolwide learning expectations
- Refinement of next steps

* Observable evidence includes analyzing results of what students are doing and producing; student interviews and observations; hard data information; other interviews, observations, etc.

Timeline: Flow of Activities

March-June	Players	Product
• Participation in training/-orientation	Principal/SC/Staff and other School Community Members	None
• Development of Student/-Community Profile	Student Profile Committee	Summary Support data
• Clarification of expected schoolwide learning expectations	Leadership Team	List & process Description
• Review of progress from last full self-study, subsequent reports and revisits/reviews	School Committees	Response to each recommendation
• Understanding use of WASC criteria	Schoolwide Focus Groups	None
September-February		
• Student programs: What should be, what exists	Subject Area/Grade Level & other School Committees	Notes/evidence for self-study use
• Data gathering based on WASC criteria	Subject Area/Grade Level & other School Committees	Notes/evidence for Focus Groups
• Synthesis of all information/evidence. Determination of growth needs	Schoolwide Focus Groups	Summary, evidence
• Creation of a schoolwide action plan using Schoolwide Focus Group findings	Leadership Team	Written plan
• Determination of specific action steps to support schoolwide action plan	School Committees	Support steps
• Establishment of follow-up process	Leadership Team	Description
March-April		
• The visit	School/Visiting Committee	V.C. Report

"Once stakeholders can see the issues and perspectives of the others, they are better positioned to take actions that will support and enhance others' specific situations."

— Beverly Anderson
"The Stages of Systematic Change"
Educational Leadership, September, 1993

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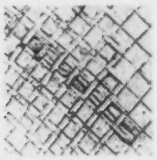


What Is the Relationship of *Focus on Learning* to 21st Century Curricular and Accountability Issues?

The revised WASC accreditation process has raised some important questions from the constituency in the field. One of these questions is stated below:

> *With respect to the new Focus on Learning accreditation process, what if...? a school is just beginning to develop schoolwide learning expectations; a school is struggling between viewpoints of what is being taught versus what is being learned; and/or a school is in the initial learning stages of examining student work?*

As Marlow and Minehira state in their HSLA Monograph (1996) it is critical for the 21st century that "principals provide leadership in curriculum innovation and implementation." *Focus on Learning* is a process that enables a school to develop a shared vision to ensure the accomplishment of its vision, mission and learning expectations--the basic premise of School Renewal (Ikeda, 1995). By developing schoolwide learning expectations, principals can assist the staff in creating a basis for all curricular work that is consistent not

only in programs and practices, but also in assessment. Principals can utilize *Focus on Learning* to involve the staff actively in the dialogue and analysis of program and student learning necessary for school growth along the continuum of instructional improvement.

Another question that has been raised is equally important.

> *What is the greatest risk schools are taking in this new process, Focus on Learning, as they struggle with 21st Century issues?*

The overall greatest challenge for schools is immersing all stakeholders in a process that empowers them to focus on the essential tasks of education:

(1) analysis of learning for all students;
(2) determination of what exists and what needs to be modified to support high achievement of all students; and
(3) accomplishment of those needed improvements.

A school leader will find the accreditation self-study process is integral to the development of a schoolwide improvement plan that is monitored and updated annually. *Focus on Learning* can become the basis for a school's self-assessment, determination of needs, and setting of priorities that results in the schoolwide action plan (Ikeda, 1995). Marlow and Minehira (1996) emphasize that principals

must "work closely with teachers" for effective curricular change, implementation, and assessment of what is being taught. Principals need an enabling process such as *Focus on Learning* to support them in these efforts, to overcome the factors that could limit this implementation, and to provide a vehicle for ongoing assessment of learning. All educators are accountable for successful student learning based upon high quality standards (Heim 1996). Because the *Focus on Learning* process is predicated upon the school's analysis of learning for all students based upon established schoolwide learning expectations, it becomes an organizer for managing "internal-external" dimensions of accountability (Heim 1996).

> *"Without a growing discourse about curriculum purposes, student understandings, and ways teachers can foster student learning, assessment measures such as portfolios and exhibitions will not have a very long or inspiring history."*
>
> — Vito Perrone
> "How to Engage Students in Learning"
> *Educational Leadership*, February, 1991

To What Extent Is *Focus on Learning* an Effective School Improvement Process?

Schools are finding that the *Focus on Learning* process facilitates a student-centered self-examination as teachers and other stakeholders evaluate what exists and what needs to be improved. Direct impact of this process on student learning will not be evident for 1-3 years. The five *Focus on Learning* key outcomes and the required documentation provide clear guidelines and direction that emphasize the attention on student learning. The expectations which are having a major impact are that all certificated staff members and other stakeholders participate in the development of the schoolwide learning expectations and serve on schoolwide interdisciplinary committees.

Although the concept of flexibility is an adjustment from more structured self-study processes, schools are finding the new process also enhances the focus on student learning as they modify the organization of the self-study, the development of the report and the design of the visit. Overall, schools and visiting committees praise *Focus on Learning* as an efficient vehicle for school improvement. One school's self-study coordinator commented, "We are two years ahead of where we would be with the previous WASC process."

How Is Student Learning Impacted Through the Development, Clarification or Refinement of the Schoolwide Learning Expectations?

The requirement to develop schoolwide learning expectations raises the schools' awareness that assessment of student learning is the foundation of a self-evaluation. Furthermore, schools recognize that refining and assessing these learning expectations is integral to ongoing improvement. The learning expectations help schools solidify schoolwide beliefs about student learning and move the instructional staff beyond concentration on specific curricular areas. Their determination also creates a vehicle for involving the classified staff, parents, district staff, and board members.

How Is Student Learning Impacted Through the Comparison of the School to the Criteria?

The schools are finding that the criteria can be invaluable in the following ways:

- the promotion of schoolwide engagement in considering issues of student success
- the focusing of the school community on student learning
- the examination of what students do rather than what adults do

The schools see that the criteria can be instrumental in quality discussions about learning, especially in the schoolwide focus groups.

How Is Student Learning Impacted by the Gathering and Analysis of Evidence?

Focus on Learning causes greater reflection about what students are actually doing both at the schoolwide and discipline/support levels. However, the work with evidence is a major undertaking. Areas of struggle that must be addressed include:

- the definition of evidence
- the distinction between gathering and analyzing
- the linkage to learning expectations and criteria
- the concept of working collaboratively on analysis
- the managing/organizing of the evidence

Overall, schools are finding that the process provides leverage for focusing on student learning through the requirements to gather and analyze evidence, including student work, with respect to the schoolwide learning expectations and the WASC criteria. In their discussions and decisions about curriculum and instruction, staff members are addressing the essential questions: "How do you know all students are learning?" and "What evidence supports the results?" Schools and visiting committees view this as an important first step in implementing changes that will directly impact student learning.

How Does Focus on Learning Facilitate the Development of a Schoolwide Action Plan?

Schools laud the required stakeholder involvement which leads to increased support for the schoolwide action plan. Consolidating the findings from the focus groups and obtaining schoolwide consensus is difficult and time consuming but valuable. Another challenging aspect is the integration of the *Focus on Learning* action plan with other plans. Schools feel that establishing a detailed schoolwide action plan after the visit is acceptable, if they are held accountable through the WASC process.

How Is the Schoolwide Action Plan Linked to the Schoolwide Learning Expectations, the Criteria and the Evidence?

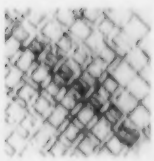
All schools agree that the schoolwide action plan should be cohesive, focused and tied to the schoolwide learning expectations, the WASC criteria and the evidence.

How Is Schoolwide Improvement Facilitated by the Follow-up Process Developed by the School?

Schools are finding there is increased understanding and value in the concept of schoolwide accountability. They feel that sharing the schoolwide action plan with all stakeholders is an important beginning to meaningful follow-up and ongoing monitoring. Most schools find the additional requirement of discipline/stakeholder group action steps strengthened the commitment to the schoolwide action plan through greater staff involvement.

"Networking turns lonely ordeals into shared ordeals. Lonely ordeals debilitate; shared ordeals inspire and motivate."

— Phillip C. Schlechty
"On the Frontiers of School Reform with Trailblazers, Pioneers and Settlers"
Journal of Staff Development, Fall, 1993



Final Thoughts

The schools and the visiting committees find *Focus on Learning* to be a cohesive process that provides a paradigm for schoolwide growth rather than a concentration on separate discipline components of schooling. Unanimously, schools and visiting committees feel that *Focus on Learning* provides a much stronger structure for analysis of "where a school is" and "where the school needs to be." Compared to past self-studies, more stakeholders view the *Focus on Learning* self-study report as a living document. The WASC "umbrella" makes it acceptable for stakeholders to examine themselves in a more meaningful way than with prior WASC models.

The challenge for the Accrediting Commission for Schools is to strengthen the support to the schools as they utilize this school improvement process. Stanley Pogrow (1996) states reform

requires specific supporting methodologies in order for it to be successful--the "how to". The Commission views this re-enforcement as a joint effort with other educational organizations as all work together to provide training, strategies and materials in the following areas: facilitation skills for school staff; strategies for the development of schoolwide learning expectations and corresponding performance-based assessment strategies; the disaggregation of data and its relationship to performance-based assessment; and the establishment, implementation, and monitoring of a schoolwide action plan.

The *Focus on Learning* process has already demonstrated its inherent power to be integral to the "heart" of education--successful student learning. More specifically, this process will assist schools with the following:

- a strong focus on student learning
- schoolwide examination of the instructional program
- school renewal efforts
- promotion of collaborative leadership
- engagement of all staff and other stakeholders in meaningful dialogue
- sharing of ideas/materials among staff
- internal use of existing resources
- celebration of the strong elements of the school's program
- increased awareness by students of the school's learning expectations

In conclusion, the *Focus on Learning* process enables schools to refocus on all the students. As one school stated: "It was a true growth opportunity for the school."

Appendix A

Key Terminology

To ensure common understanding of the terms which are used in the criteria, essential questions, and rubrics, the following definitions are provided and will be operational for *Focus on Learning*.

Accreditation: a voluntary process whereby a school conducts a self-study that serves as the basis for a review by a team of educators not employed by the district. The team members assist the school in appraising their instructional program. The school is evaluated on: (1) the degree to which there is clarity of purpose that is reflected through the school's leadership, instructional program, policies, and use of time and resources; and (2) how adequately the WASC criteria are being met. The maximum term of accreditation is six years. Some school districts require their schools to be accredited.

Action Plan: A school's step-by-step process that details specific activities using existing resources that can address a school's identified growth needs.

All Students: A reference to the belief that all students can learn at high levels and should have sufficient support to enable them to achieve the schoolwide learning expectations. Every student enrolled in the school (including those with limited English proficiency and those identified as special education), regardless of sub-population or unique characteristics, is included.

Challenging Relevant Curriculum: A demanding curriculum based on themes and concepts that

encourages the student to achieve at high levels, to use "higher order thinking skills," and to apply and synthesize knowledge.

Coherent Curriculum: A curriculum that is viewed as a broadly conceived concept and makes sense as a whole with subparts unified, connected and integrated.

Course/Subject Area Expectations: Established goals, objectives and expectations for what students are to know and be able to do upon the completion of a class, course or sequence of courses within a subject area or department. These expectations are aligned with the schoolwide learning expectations and "enable" students to progress toward accomplishing these expectations.

Current Educational Research and Thinking: Research and related discourse and publications on education and learning. Examples include: the work of such authors as Grant Wiggins, Theodore Sizer, William Slavin, Phillip Schlechty, Ann Lieberman, Lynne Miller, Carlene Murphy, Michael Fullan, Lauren Resnick and Richard Sagor; work and publications on state, national, and subject area standards; and government, business, and industry research (see Tools: Resources).

Diverse Population: The variety of sub-populations in the school, populations defined by ethnicity, gender, religious affiliations/beliefs, ability levels, socio-economic status, etc.

Indicator: A statement that provides further explanation of a criterion.

Portfolio: A collection of representative student work.

Purpose: A clarification of the beliefs held by members of the school community about what the school can do for students with respect to knowledge, skills, and understandings through the school program.

School Community: The school community includes faculty, support staff, non-certificated staff, administration, parents, students, district, school board, and community partners (business, educational institutions, agencies, and service organizations).

Schoolwide Action Plan: the overall improvement strategies as a result of the self-study process.

Schoolwide Learning Expectation: What a student should know, be able to do and understand by graduation. These learning expectations are collaboratively developed and represent the focus of the entire school community.

Special Needs: Students who need additional physical and/or mental support services to accomplish the expected schoolwide learning expectations at their maximum potential.

Subject Area: A specific body of information or knowledge; a discipline.

Self-Study Coordinator (SC): The facilitator/leader of the school's accreditation process in collaboration with the school leadership.

Appendix B

Focus on Learning Criteria, Indicators

WASC Pilot Criteria, Indicators, and Suggested Evidence
January 30, 1995

A. Organization For Student Learning

School Purpose

1. The school has established a clear statement of purpose that reflects the beliefs and philosophy of the institution and research-based knowledge about teaching and learning.

Indicators

a. A written statement of purpose reflecting the beliefs and philosophy is publicized to the school and its constituency.
b. Those involved in the formation of the school purpose are representative of the school and its constituency.
c. Consensus exists within the school community on the school's purpose and is sustained by a regular review process.
d. The school purpose is the basis for defining the school program and schoolwide learning expectations; i.e., what all students should know, be able to do and understand by graduation.

e. Influences that impact the development or revision of the school's purpose may include:
   (1) governing board
   (2) school instructional and support staff
   (3) student/parent/community input
   (4) research-based knowledge about teaching and learning

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- student/community profile data and their impact on the school purpose and schoolwide learning expectations
- research-based knowledge about teaching and learning
- national and state educational issues
- which members of the school community have been involved in the establishment of the purpose and learning expectations
- the degree of involvement by representatives of the entire school community in the development of the purpose and learning expectations
- the process for reaching consensus among the school community members
- the degree of consistency between the school purpose, the schoolwide learning expectations, and the school program
- the extent to which the schoolwide learning expectations define the school's course and program goals/results

- the process for regular communication with the school community regarding the school purpose
- publications used to inform parents/community members about the school program
- additional evidence

Governance

2. The governing authority: (1) adopts policies which are consistent with the school purpose and drive the learning expectations for the school, (2) delegates implementation to the professional staff, and (3) monitors results.

Indicators

a. The selection, composition and specific duties of the governing authority facilitate achievement of the school's purpose.
b. The nature and extent of the governing authority's role are clearly understood by the school community.
c. The school leadership and staff implement the policies adopted by the governing authority.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- the legal ownership and organization of the school
- the selection, composition and specific duties of the governing authority
- board policies

- the connection between the governing authority's policies and the school's
  - the relationship between the governing authority and the professional staff
  - the evaluation procedures carried out by the governing authority
  - the process for evaluation of the governing authority
  - additional evidence

School Leadership

3. The school leadership: (1) makes decisions to facilitate actions that focus the energies of the school on student achievement of the schoolwide learning expectations, (2) empowers the staff, and (3) encourages commitment, participation and shared accountability for student learning.

Indicators

a. The responsibilities and relationships among school leadership, staff and other members of the school community are clearly defined and understood.
b. The professional staff commits to, participates in, and shares in accountability for student learning.
c. Effective structures for communication, planning, and conflict resolution exist and are regularly reviewed.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- administrator and faculty written policies, charts, and handbooks that define responsibilities and relationships

- the structures for internal communications and resolving differences
- the leadership's processes and procedures for involving staff in shared responsibility and actions to support student learning
- the level of actual staff involvement in actions focusing on successful student learning
- the degree to which the actions of the leadership are directly linked to student achievement of the schoolwide learning expectations
- additional evidence

Staff

4. The school leadership and staff are qualified, committed to the school's purpose and to ongoing professional development that will promote student learning.

Indicators

a. The governing authority and school leadership employ qualified instructional and support staff who are assigned to ensure maximum student achievement of schoolwide learning expectations.

b. The teachers feel a strong sense of efficacy in their work as they translate the schoolwide learning expectations into reality in their classes.

c. Staff development addresses schoolwide learning expectations and specific student needs.

d. The school leadership actively supports the professional development of staff through allocation of time and use of personnel and fiscal resources.
e. The school leadership and staff work cooperatively to create an environment that supports the achievement of student learning expectations.
f. A system of professional evaluation is utilized as a tool for fostering the professional growth of leadership and staff.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- employment policies/practices related to qualification requirements
- information on staff background, training and preparation
- staff assignments to maximize use of their expertise
- the degree to which school leadership supports professional development with time, personnel and fiscal resources
- the degree of participation in professional opportunities
- the degree to which the environment enables teachers to focus on students accomplishing the learning expectations
- the evaluation procedures utilized and their effectiveness in promoting professional growth
- the processes used to determine the measurable effect of professional development on student work and

accomplishment of the schoolwide learning expectations
- additional evidence

School Environment

5. A safe, healthy, nurturing environment that reflects the school's purpose is characterized by a respect for differences, trust, caring, professionalism, support, and high expectations for each student.

Indicators

a. A clearly defined code of student conduct supports a safe and orderly environment that is conducive to learning and is understood by students, teachers, and parents.
b. Relationships among the staff and between staff and leadership are characterized by mutual respect, two-way communication, and support.
c. Teachers are supported and encouraged to utilize innovative approaches to enhance student learning.
d. There is evidence in the school environment that student self-esteem is fostered through high expectations for each student and recognition of their successes.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- the policies and use of resources to ensure a safe, healthy, nurturing environment

- the degree to which caring, concern, and high expectations for students is demonstrated on a daily basis
- the degree to which specific strategies demonstrate an atmosphere of trust, respect, and professionalism
- additional evidence

Reporting Student Progress

6. The school leadership and staff regularly review and report to the rest of the school community student progress toward accomplishing the school's purpose related to student learning.

Indicators

a. Procedures ensure that the school leadership and staff regularly review student progress to assist teachers, students, and parents in understanding the linkage between specific curricular expectations and what students learn.
b. Student progress is assessed to determine the degree to which students are achieving the schoolwide learning expectations.
c. The school assesses the impact of the educational program on students and identifies areas for improvement through follow-up studies of graduates.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- how student progress is determined and monitored
- existing standards used in the determination of learning

- the degree to which the linkage between what is learned and the schoolwide learning expectations is understood by staff, students and parents
- student work/performance
- follow-up studies of graduates
- the procedures to communicate to the governing authority and members of the school community about student progress
- the degree of correlation between school improvement, professional development activities/topics and student progress of the schoolwide learning expectations
- additional evidence

School Improvement Process

7. Based on the self-study and the visiting committee report, the school leadership facilitates school improvement, a process which: (1) is driven by a plan of action that embodies quality learning for all students, (2) has school community commitment and involvement, and (3) effectively guides the work of the school. The leadership and instructional staff in cooperation with the rest of the school community demonstrate accountability through the monitoring of the schoolwide action plan implementation.

Indicators

a. Schoolwide plans which embody quality learning for all students are developed based on analysis of the results of the self-study.

b. Leadership and staff plan, organize, manage, and support an ongoing improvement process that has broad-based school community participation and commitment.

c. *Leadership supports implementation* and accomplishment of action plans by providing:
   - effective communication channels among staff, students, parents, and other community members
   - allocation of time, fiscal and personnel resources

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- the degree to which the school planning process is broad-based and collaborative
- the degree of correlation between the school plans and analysis of student achievement of the learning expectations
- the degree of correlation between allocation of time/fiscal/personnel resources, improvement plans, and learning expectations
- degree of specificity in the school plans
- the specific benchmarks and accountability tools used in the monitoring process
- additional evidence. . .

B. Curriculum and Instruction

What Students Learn

1. The school provides a challenging, coherent and relevant curriculum for each student that fulfills the school's purpose and results in student achievement of the schoolwide learning expectations (what all students should know and be able to do).

Indicators

a. The curricular goals are congruent with the schoolwide learning expectations.
b. The school's written learning objectives explain course expectations for all students to include:
   (1) effective communication
   (2) conceptual thinking
   (3) problem solving
   (4) application of concepts and skills in realistic situations
c. The course offerings available to students are part of a coherent and relevant curriculum in accord with the school's purpose.
d. The professional staff utilizes assessment processes to measure the expected student learnings.
e. The academic foundation prepares students for pursuing further education and/or entering the work force.
f. The school considers national/community issues and student/parent needs in the modification of the curricular program.

g. The school staff analyzes the current thinking of the curricular areas to determine their relevance in maintaining a viable, meaningful instructional program for students; e.g., state and national standards, curriculum associations, affiliated educational associations.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- the degree to which the curricular goals are congruent with the school-wide learning expectations
- current educational research and thinking related to the various subject areas and curricular programs
- the written learning objectives for each subject area and level
- the intra- and interrelationships between course, subject area and program offerings
- the degree of integration between concepts and skills from various subject areas
- the articulation processes among and between levels and other schools/programs
- the degree of congruence between the actual concepts and skills taught and the course/program goals/objectives
- the degree of curricular alignment of instructional objectives, teaching processes and evaluation of learning
- student work and engagement in learning that demonstrates the implementation of the curricular goals in which

students effectively communicate, critically think, problem solve and apply knowledge and skills
- the procedures used for curriculum development, evaluation and revisions
- the curricular organization of the school, including graduation requirements, credits, grading policy, homework policy
- the access and participation of all students in the challenging, coherent and relevant curriculum
- master schedule, daily schedule
- class enrollment lists
- additional evidence

How Students Learn

2. The professional staff designs and implements a variety of learning experiences which actively engage students at a high level of learning that is consistent with the school's purposes and expectations.

Indicators

a. There is evidence that demonstrates instructional planning.
b. Teachers are actively involved in directing and facilitating student learning.
c. Students understand the level of performance required to meet the curricular expectations.
d. Students are actively involved in the learning process.
e. Students demonstrate the ability to utilize higher order thinking processes.

f. Teachers demonstrate teaching techniques appropriate to subject matter and grade level.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- demonstration that students are actively engaged in learning, especially through examination of students working and their work
- student use of resources for learning beyond the limits of the textbook, such as effective use of technology, collaborative activities, community resources
- the degree of student understanding of the expected level of performance
- the degree to which teachers implement teaching techniques that enhance the active involvement of students appropriate to the subject matter and grade level
- student work that demonstrates the ability to think critically, problem solve, relate learning to past experiences and knowledge, and apply the new learning through concrete examples and experiences
- student portfolios, projects/performances/discussions
- the degree of involvement in the learning of students with diverse backgrounds and abilities
- classroom observations of students working
- student interviews

- the degree to which various learning styles are addressed through the instructional approaches
- additional evidence

How Assessment Is Used

3. Teacher and student use of assessment is frequent and integrated into the teaching/learning process. The assessment results are the basis for: (1) measurement of each student's progress toward the schoolwide learning expectations, (2) regular evaluation and improvement of curriculum and instruction, and (3) allocation of resources.

Indicators

a. Through various methods of assessments teachers regularly determine that students have acquired a specific body of knowledge and/or skills.
b. Teachers use student feedback to determine whether course objectives have been met.
c. Students and parents are informed of assessment results.
d. Student assessment is used as a determinant for resource allocation.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- the nature and types of assessment
- the correlation of assessment to schoolwide learning expectations, curricular objectives and instructional approaches used

- student work that demonstrates understanding and application of knowledge and skills
- student portfolios, projects/performances/discussions
- the modifications and revisions in the curriculum and instruction as a result of student assessment, both collectively and individually
- student assessment
- student interviews
- the monitoring of student progress over time
- the degree to which students and parents are active in the learning/assessment process
- the allocation of resources, including the provision for professional development opportunities, based upon assessment results
- additional evidence

C. Support For Student Personal and Academic Growth

Student Connectedness

1. Students are connected to a system of support services, activities and opportunities at the school and within the community to meet the challenges of the curricular/co-curricular program in order to achieve the schoolwide learning expectations.

Indicators

a. Personalized student support is directly correlated with student achievement of the schoolwide learning expectations.
b. The school coordinates the system of support services for maximum effectiveness.
c. The school provides adequate services to support students in such areas as health, career and guidance counseling, personal counseling and academic assistance.
d. Students are involved in curricular/co-curricular activities such as student government, service projects and athletics.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- the level of involvement of teachers with students within and outside the classroom
- the relationship of the support services and activities to the classroom instruction
- the strategies to develop students' self-esteem, a personalized approach to learning, and connections to the learning environment
- the degree to which the co-curricular activities are linked to the schoolwide learning expectations
- student profile
- student use of support services
- processes for intervention and their linkage to each other

- the relationship of support services and activities to post-graduation and career planning and preparation
- additional evidence

Parent/Community Involvement

2. The school leadership employs a wide range of strategies to ensure that parental and community involvement is integral to the school's established support system for students.

Indicators

a. Parents and other community members are involved in advisory groups, volunteer services, fund raising and development efforts.
b. Parents are kept informed through newsletters, conferences, and discussion groups.
c. The school uses community resources to support students such as career days, business partnerships, speakers, and professional services.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- the level of parent and community member involvement in the life of the school
- the procedures for keeping parents/community informed
- the degree to which community resources are utilized to support students

- the level of understanding regarding student achievement of the schoolwide learning expectations through the school's program
- additional evidence

D. Resource Management And Development

Resources

1. The resources available to the school are sufficient to sustain the school program and are effectively used to carry out the school's purpose.

Indicators

a. Schoolwide assessment of learning results influences all resource allocation decisions made by the site and governing authority.
b. The procedures that guide resource allocation involve leadership and staff as appropriate.
c. The finances are allocated in a manner consistent with the purpose of the school and student learning expectations.
d. Financial management follows acceptable business and accounting practices and is subject to regular independent review.
e. The governing authority provides facilities that are adequate to meet the purpose of the school; i.e., safe, functional, and well-maintained.
f. Instructional materials are adequately supplied and maintained, such as text-

books, other printed material, audio-visuals, support technology, manipulatives, laboratory materials.

g. Sufficient resources are allocated to acquire, maintain, and nurture a well-qualified staff.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- the annual budget
- the most recent audit
- protections against mishandling of institutional funds
- the relationship of allocations to the assessment of learning results
- the business and accounting practices
- the degree of involvement of staff in the resource allocation
- the procedures for maintaining the physical facilities, acquiring and maintaining adequate instructional materials, and hiring and nurturing a well-qualified staff support
- additional evidence

Resource Planning

2. The governing authority and the school execute responsible resource planning for the future.

Indicators

a. The philosophy of the school embraces the concept of a master plan.

b. The governing authority and the school re-examine the long-range plan regularly to ensure the continual availability of

appropriate resources that support the school's purpose and learning expectations.

c. Schools employ marketing strategies to support the implementation of the developmental program.

Suggested evidence to examine in school comparison to the criterion:

- the master plan
- the procedures for regular examination of the long-range plan
- the marketing strategies used
- the research and information used to form the long-range plan
- the involvement of school community members in the future planning
- additional evidence

Appendix C

Resources

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